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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000493

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/29/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR OVIP NI

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH FORMER PRESIDENT OBASANJO

Classified By: Ambassador Robin Renee Sanders for reasons in Sections 1 .4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Ambassador met with former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, at his Hill top residence in Abeokuta, Ogun State on Dec. 23. The discussion focused on several topics including recent developments in the Congo, U.S. support for Nigeria and upcoming elections in Nigeria. The unexpected presence of former Ministry of Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary Ambassador Joe Keshi in the meeting inhibited a more candid conversation between Ambassador and Obasanjo on sensitive Nigerian political issues ranging from elections to internal politics. Ambassador Keshi has been known to repeat private diplomatic exchanges directly to the Nigerian press. END SUMMARY

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CONGO

¶2. (C) When asked about recent developments in the Congo, Obasanjo said that reports from his assessment team indicate that "things are looking more civilized in the Congo and there is weapon control." On the performance of the Congo's President, Joseph Kabilia, Obasanjo said "he is not a fool" and noted that the past election in the Congo "solved the issue of legitimacy, but not the issue of development, as the country is particularly lacking in human development." Obasanjo plans to brief the African Union (AU) on developments in the Congo at the Summit in February 2010. He also plans to visit the United States in late January or early February, after the AU Summit.

¶3. (C) Obasanjo further stated that the Congo is in need of several things: human capacity, international support, assistance with the military and police and a robust civil society.

MESSAGE TO SECRETARY CLINTON

¶4. (C) Ambassador asked the former leader of Nigeria if there was anything he would like her to communicate back to Washington and he said to tell Secretary Clinton that Nigeria needs help. "What we are going through, the good and the bad, is temporary," he said. He expressed that Nigeria has the largest population in Africa and cannot be ignored. He also noted that what he learned from his eight years of presidency is, what seems like a very bad situation can

easily be turned around.

UPCOMING ELECTIONS

¶5. (C) Regarding the February 6, 2010 gubernatorial elections in Anambra State, Obasanjo stated that "if a sensible man emerges as the winner, the election will be successful." Ambassador noted U.S. support for free and fair elections in Anambra as well as the presence of an international monitoring team, that would include members from U.S. Mission Nigeria.

¶6. (C) On the 2011 Presidential election, Ambassador asked Obasanjo for his assessment on electoral reform and the discussions going on now of having the elections six months earlier to allow ample time for appeals and legal battles that will likely follow. Obasanjo said that, in his view, this action is highly unnecessary and that moving the election up three months, for example to February 2011, would allow enough time for legal battles to be settled, providing that the judicial structures are set up specifically to address all electoral challenges in a timely manner with designated election tribunals.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Given Ambassador Keshi's unexpected presence during
LAGOS 00000493 002 OF 002

the meeting, Ambassador modified the sensitive topics which she planned to discuss with former President Obasanjo, such as the prospects for extra-constitutional activities in the event that President Yar'Adua remains incapacitated, machinations within the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), his views on Vice President Jonathan, and whether he was planning a comeback. Obasanjo remains as wily as ever and outside of his residence it was clear that a range of politicians were milling about. There are reports that Obasanjo is regaining some of the footholds he had lost within the PDP over the last 18 months as members move back into his camp. This is a result of President Yar'Adua's incapacitation, VP Jonathan's insecurities regarding his leadership, the weak leadership of the PDP chairman, and the range of governors shuttling back and forth between the various PDP factions.

8 (C) Obasanjo remains a person to watch through out the next year as it appears that he wants to be able to control or at least influence the person who ends up as Nigeria's next leader. He clearly overestimated Yar'Adua's allegiance to him and was for the most part locked out of the Villa during much of the current president's tenure. Obasanjo is unlikely to make that kind of mistake again. We understand that Jonathan is reaching out to people like Obasanjo and Senate President Mark almost everyday to receive guidance on running the country.

¶9. (U) ConGen Lagos coordinated this telegram with Embassy Abuja
BLAIR